Hamish Macbeth and the Canyon Stand-Off

by Cielag

Summary: As Hamish Macbeth fights for his life against a dangerous
outlaw, he realises that his greatest threat is still lying in the
shadows.

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Author's Note: This is a western alternate universe for Hamish
Macbeth where I have him as the sheriff of the small town called
Sunnyside in south-eastern Wyoming. I am mainly only borrowing Hamish
for this verse and am not profiting from him in any way. I'm just
exploring the fact that Hamish loves westerns and so I have put him
in a western setting. All other characters, especially Elijah
Marshall and Luke Hagen, are of my own creation. Any reference to
people deceased or living is purely coincidental.

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><p>James and Hamish continued to wrestle on the hard soil, neither
one gaining ground until James was able to secure his foot against
Hamish's stomach and throw him off. In an instant James was on his
feet again and he dived at Hamish. He made a grab for Hamish's
throat, to inflict upon him the same method of disposal that had
fallen upon Elijah not too long ago, but Hamish was ready for him.
Forcing his arms between James', Hamish pushed hard against the
pressure upon his throat until he felt James' grip weakening. Then,
without losing a moment, Hamish rocked to his left side, pitching
James off of him. Wind rushed back into Hamish's lungs as he gulped
down the air that had been denied to him and he pushed himself up
onto shaking feet, drawing his six-shooter as he did so, but the
cocking of the hammer sent a cold shiver down Hamish's spine. He'd
been caught on a slow-draw.<p>

Turning a defiant scowl to James, Hamish braced himself for the inevitable impact and flinched when the hammer was released and the gun fired. But it was not Hamish who fell. James clutched his chest as a crimson stain rapidly spread beneath his fingers. He lifted his gaze and stared hard at Hamish, too stunned to hardly believe it.

'How'd you...' James seized up and fell flat on his face in which a dust cloud formed, then quickly dissipated as it resettled as though nothing was out of the ordinary.

Hamish felt bile building in his throat as he realised with sickening displeasure that the same gun that had ended James Hawton's life was pressed against the back of his neck.

'Where we stand, Hamish Macbeth?' came the long drawl of Luke Hagen, who no doubt had slunk through the shadows like the coyote he was and had appeared at the exact moment where he'd have the drop.

'That depends on which side of the law you're on this time,' replied Hamish in an annoyed hiss. He hated that this notorious outlaw who thrived on stealing from trains and rich stage coaches also loved to lend a hand in stopping murderers. The town where Luke resided knew nothing of his devious capers and, as Hamish suspected with great distaste in his mouth, they probably wouldn't mind much, considering that no criminal in his right mind would try to pilfer from those good folks. To them, Luke Hagen was a saint.

'This ain't a matter of the law, Macbeth,' said Luke as he pushed at the back of Hamish's neck, causing him to lean his head forward uncomfortably. 'That fellah was always an asshole. The real question is, are you going to do something stupid that will force me to do something that I'm mightily gonna regret?'

Hamish gritted his teeth and pushed his gun back into the holster but refrained from securing it, just in case.

'Good, very sensible of you Sheriff,' said Luke as he drew his gun away from Hamish, though unlike him, he did not holster it and simply backed away. 'I'm trustin' that you won't put a hole in my back now.'

'Chust as you wouldnae put one in mine?' replied Hamish with a haughty sneer. He turned around, expecting to see nothing but the darkness of the canyon walls but to his surprise, he saw Luke kneeling down next to Elijah. Hamish's instincts kicked in and he gripped the the handle of his pistol.

'You can come back to us now, Elijah,' said Luke quietly as he pressed his fingers against the side of Elijah's neck, observing him with keen interest. 'Though, with the beating you took and the...' He pulled at Elijah's coat and noted the small red stain that ran diagonally up his side. Luke shook his head and pushed his hat back. 'Well if that don't beat all, you took one helluva beatin' my friend.'

Hamish, still wary of Luke's presence around his injured deputy and friend, came closer. His eyes drifted over to his partner where he saw him still laying without a hint of an awakening. The blood was quite visible, though to his relief he saw that it wasn't spreading

any further. Part of him relaxed at the calmness in which Luke attended the injured deputy, but experience taught Hamish to never let his guard down, especially to an outlaw; and yet, as Hamish watched, he could feel his hand slipping from the grip and dropping to his side as he knelt at Elijah's feet.

'Last I saw of him before he went down James was throttling him pretty good,' said Hamish. He scratched his head and tried not to look as concerned as he felt.

Lifting his eyes, Luke offered Hamish a small smile and replied calmly, 'He's still breathin', if that's what you're worried about.'

'Och well, I would imagine that if he wasn't, you'd haff gone after the other...' Hamish caught himself and stared hard at Luke, knowing that it was a dangerous move to accuse Luke Hagen of favouritism, but as it was, curiosity filled Luke's eyes and an amused chuckle slipped past his lips.

'Yeah, I suppose you're right on that one, Macbeth.' He took one last look at Elijah and an odd, pained expression briefly crossed his lips before vanishing under that mask of calm that he wore so proudly in his arrogance. Rising, he said, 'It's a flesh wound, a painful one, but he'll be all right.'

'Thanks for your concern,' replied Hamish awkwardly. He watched as Elijah found his horse and climbed into the saddle. The sudden flash of a smile put an end to Hamish's hopes for a possible conclusion of their encounter for the day. He asked passively, 'Not going to hang around here an' make sure that Elijah gets proper treatment?'

'Nah, you've got that covered, Sheriff,' replied Luke with a wide grin. 'Besides, I've got a nice bit of gold to collect.' He held up the note that one of James' men had coveted earlier and must have lost it during the scuffle. Hamish cursed himself for not being alert as he should have been.

'Oh no ye don't!' shouted Hamish, leaping to his feet and drawing his six-shooter. 'That money belongs to the railroad! It's not yours, Hagen!'

'Well I'd say that he who finds treasure ought to keep that treasure.' He touched the brim of his hat and tugged it forward before urging his horse to turn around and begin trotting away.

'Luke Hagen, I am warnin' you!'

'Until our paths cross again Hamish Macbeth!' shouted Luke Hagen and with gentle encouragement from his heels, his horse cantered away, leaving Hamish standing stock still with his pistol aimed at Luke's retreating backside.

Hamish growled in frustration, desperately trying to force his finger into pulling the trigger. But no matter how much he wanted to, Hamish just couldn't shoot Luke Hagen in the back.

End

file.